

**Channel Tunnel Rail Link
London and Continental Railways
Oxford Wessex Archaeology Joint Venture**

**Human remains from Beechbrook Wood, Westwell,
Kent**

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1 INTRODUCTION

Cremated bone from 46 contexts was received for analysis, of these 29 contained burnt human remains and 17 contained burnt animal bones. The deposits included the remains of eight burials, including one unurned Bronze Age burial, a possible Late Bronze Age unurned burial, six urned burials within a small late Iron Age/early Romano-British cemetery and a mid-late Romano-British unurned burial with redeposited pyre debris (Table 1).

Small quantities of redeposited bone (<1-29g) were recovered from seven pit, eight ditch fills and one posthole fill, the features ranging in date from the Neolithic to the Romano-British period (Table 1).

2 METHODS

The general methodology followed that set-out in ‘Specialist Study Package 6’ of the *CTRL Section 1 Project Design* (RLE 2003). The cremated bone was analysed according with the standard procedures used for the examination of cremated bone set out in McKinley 1994, 5-6. Sex was ascertained from the sexually diagnostic features of the cranium (Workshop 1980; Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994).

3 RESULTS

A summary of the results is presented in Table 1, details are held in the archive.

Table 1: Summary of results from analysis of human bone

context	cut	Deposit type	date	quantification	age/sex	pathology
525	504	Redeposited in pit fill	LIA	< 1 g	unknown/ unknown	
735	737	Redeposited in pit fill	LIA - ER	2 g	unknown/ unknown	
865	864	Redeposited in ditch fill	Ne?	< 1 g	unknown/ unknown	
901	902	Redeposited in pt fill	Undated	3 g	unknown/ unknown	
908	907	Redeposited in ditch fill	Ne	< 1g	unknown/ unknown	
938	936	Redeposited in ditch fill	LIA-ER	< 1 g	unknown/ unknown	
945	947	redeposited in ditch fill	LIA-ER	< 1 g	unknown/ unknown	
956	957	redeposited in ditch fill	LIA-ER	< 1 g	unknown/ unknown	

context	cut	Deposit type	date	quantification	age/sex	pathology
					unknown	
1289	1290	unurned burial?	LBA	52 g	<18 yr?/ unknown	
1293	1294	redeposited pyre debris	LBA	< 1 g	unknown/ unknown	
1345	1344	unurned burial	MR-LR	138 g	>18 yr/ Male??	Ante-mortem tooth loss, slight spinal degenerative joint disease
1346	1344	redeposited pyre debris	MR-LR	133 g	>18yr/ unknown	
1376	1374	redeposited in pit fill	EBA	1 g	unknown/ unknown	
1377	1374	redeposited in pit fill	EBA	1 g	unknown/ unknown	
1501	1502	redeposited in posthole	LIA-ER	<1 g	unknown/ unknown	
1604	1603	unurned burial?	BA?	102 g	>18 yr/ unknown	
1674	1623	redeposited in pit fill	BA	8 g	>18 yr?/ unknown	
2030	2029	urned burial	LIA-ER	367 g	<18 yr?/ unknown	
2036	-	urned burial	LIA-ER	43 g	>18yr?/ unknown	
2040	2056	urned burial?	ER	18 g	>18yr?/ unknown	
2042	2056	burial?	ER	42 g	>18 yr/ unknown	
2044	-	urned burial?	LIA-ER	75 g	>18 yr/ unknown	
2047	-	redeposited in an ancillary vessel for burial 2048	LIA-ER	<1 g	unknown/ unknown	
2048	-	urned burial	LIA-ER	51 g	<18 yr/ unknown	
2050	-	ancillary vessel for burial 2048	LIA-ER	<1 g	unknown/ unknown	
2184	2182	redeposited in ditch fill	LIA	<1 g	unknown/ unknown	
2210	2212	redeposited in ditch fill	LIA	<1 g	unknown/ unknown	
2213	2212	redeposited in ditch fill	LIA	29 g	>18 yr /unknown	
2228	2207	redeposited in ditch fill	MIA-LIA	<1 g	unknown/ unknown	

Disturbance and condition

All of the site had suffered extensive plough-damage. The unurned Bronze Age burials (1289 and 1604) survived to a depth of c. 0.2 m and the unurned mid-late Romano-British burial

(1345) was c. 0.3 m deep. The late Iron Age-early Romano-British urned burials (2030, 2036, 2040, 2042, 2044 and 2048) had all suffered greatly from plough damage; the maximum depth of survival was 0.10 m (burial 2030), the remainder 0.02 m with only the base of the vessels surviving. This disturbance would have resulted in loss of bone from the deposits and increased bone fragmentation. All bone from all contexts is slightly chalky in appearance (eroded) and very little trabecular bone was recovered, both are largely reflective of an acidic burial environment. The only undisturbed deposit was the unurned burial deposit 1345, where no bones were visible on the surface of the feature.

The small deposits of burnt bone in the Neolithic contexts, and the small quantities from Bronze Age to Romano-British contexts are likely to be redeposited.

Demographic data

Two individuals, one adult and one possibly adult, both unsexed are represented by the Bronze Age cremated remains. A minimum of six individuals are dated to the late Iron Age-early Romano-British. These comprised two adults, three possible adults, one subadult individuals and two unaged individuals. All were unsexed. One adult, possibly male individual dated to mid-late Romano-British period. The total number of individuals represented by the cremated bone deposits is 10, of which four were definitely adults, five were probably adults, one was a subadult, one could not be aged and only one could be sexed as a probable male.

Pathology

Pathological lesions were present on the adult male represented in cremation burial 1345. The right mandibular body fragment present showed evidence of ante-mortem tooth loss. Also, a thoracic vertebral body also had slight porosity on the joint surfaces.

Pyre technology and cremation ritual

The cremated bone from all deposits was white in colour indicative of full oxidation (Holden et al 1995a and b; McKinley 2000, 40). The low weight of the burial deposits was largely due to bone loss as a result of disturbance coupled with the loss of trabecular bone in the acidic soil conditions. These factors would also have affected the level of fragmentation within each burial. Within the burials, between 39% and 63% of the bone fragments were recovered from the 5mm fraction size and the maximum surviving bone fragment was between c.24mm and c. 45mm. Usually, an urn would protect the bone and the fragments would tend, therefore, to be slightly larger. However, in this instance the vessels were heavily truncated and there was no difference in fragment size between urned and unurned deposits.

Elements from all skeletal areas were represented in the burials the small quantity of fragments from the axial skeleton is more representative of the loss of bone due to soil acidity than to their deliberate exclusion (see above) and the relatively high proportion of cranial fragments is due to the ease of identification. There was no apparent preference in skeletal elements included in any of the burials.

Two small flint chips were included in the Bronze Age possible unurned burial 1604. The chips were unburnt and were, therefore, not present on the pyre but included in the deposit when the remains were buried.

Fragments of cremated bird bones (<1 g) were present in the Romano-British deposit 2030 and burnt animal bone fragments (1 g) were included in deposit 1345. These are likely to represent the remains of pyre goods. Copper fragments (<1 g) were also present in burial 2030. It is impossible to say what these fragments may have represented since such a small amount was recovered but it is likely they had derived from grave goods or pyre goods. Two iron nail or stud fragments were recovered from deposit 1345. The nails may have derived from grave goods, pyre goods, mortuary furniture or the fuel used to build the pyre. A small Late Bronze Age pit (0.06m deep) contained mainly charcoal and less than 1 g of burnt bone. The form and composition of the archaeological components suggest the fill represented redeposited pyre debris rather than the remains of a burial.

The small quantities of bone recovered from the Neolithic ring ditch (865 and 908) came from the upper fill together with intrusive Bronze Age pottery fragments. The small quantity of bone is therefore also likely to be intrusive.

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